



## South Florida East Coast Corridor Study News Clip

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Subject: **Wanted: smarter way to pay for rail**  
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### **Wanted: smarter way to pay for rail**

*By Sun Sentinel Editorial Board*

Good news on the rail front: After 15 years, Tri-Rail will finally get to schedule its commuter trains and maintain the 72 miles of track it shares with CSX freight trains. As a result, the commuter rail line should be able to improve its on-time performance and operate its trains more efficiently between Miami International Airport and Mangonia Park in Palm Beach County.

Now the bad news: All Aboard Florida, the privately funded venture that promises to create fast rail service between Miami and Orlando now says communities will have to pony up beaucoup bucks to silence loud train whistles along the line.

Both developments mean more future tax money from the pockets of South Floridians, who simply can't afford it.

On Tri-Rail, the recent agreement between the state Department of Transportation and CSX Transportation is a big deal for commuters. Right now, when scheduling the tracks, CSX gives priority to its freight trains, slowing down commuter trains and eroding public confidence that the line will get you there on time.

To make it happen, the state agreed to pay \$11.5 million a year. But the deal lasts only seven years. After that, the counties of Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade must find a way to pay for the partnership. Problem is, the Florida Legislature won't give Tri-Rail a path to raising money, having nixed a proposed tax on rental cars. So in six short years, the counties will be staring down a combined \$30 million hit to their general funds.

Then there is All Aboard Florida, the new inter-city train service that began with a promising start, but now seems headed down the wrong track.

The initiative, which would be the closest thing to high-speed rail service between Miami and Orlando, won praise because the firm developing it has eschewed public funds.

Unfortunately, Florida East Coast Industries, its owner, failed to include the costs of "quiet zones," which are essential to boosting safety and minimizing noise at railroad crossings.

Federal regulations require engineers to sound their horns before reaching a crossing, and at decibel levels that rival the noise of a nearby jackhammer, the wail of additional train whistles won't go unnoticed by residents living near the tracks.

The municipalities could seek federal noise-abatement grants to pay for new gates, lights or raised medians to offset the need for train whistles, but why should they? The pledge was to use private funding. There is no justification to back off that promise now.

To keep the peace and quiet, local government officials should hold out for All Aboard Florida officials to make good on their promise to rely solely on private funds to build the needed second track and pay the costs of curbing train whistle noise at local railroad crossings along the corridor.

South Florida needs improvements in its current commuter-rail service and a new intercity rail system that promises to bring economic and tourist benefits to both Central and South Florida. The challenge is to make sure local taxpayers don't get stuck paying bills that also benefit private business and the entire state.